

## THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM: SPACES FOR DIALOGUE

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‘...all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meaning, and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people...these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia.’  
(Bakhtin, 1981, pp.291-292)

**Abstract:** The following article constructs an account of the pedagogy of a teacher of literature in an Australian secondary school. It provides a small window on her professional practice, and draws on a range of data, including notes made by a ‘critical friend’ as she observed the teacher giving lessons over several days. The participating teacher shared her lesson plans and engaged in conversations with her critical friend, as well as writing reflections about her teaching. In addition to recording classroom observations, the critical friend wrote extended reflections about what she had observed, sometimes in response to the teacher’s ensuing reflections about the success of the lessons. The study thus arises out of a professional dialogue between the teacher and her critical friend, and it attempts to convey a sense of their continuing conversation, as they reflect on what they have learnt from their collaboration. The article captures not only the professional learning which the teacher and her critical friend experienced through their ongoing dialogue, but the exchanges that occurred in this teacher’s classroom, as her students engaged in interpretive discussions in response to the text they were studying. The very best literature classrooms - so this article maintains - enable students to engage in exploratory talk (Barnes, 1978), where the very notion of ‘literature’, as an esteemed body of texts, is open to interrogation. The students in this classroom appropriate the language of literary analysis in a dialogical way (Bakhtin, 1981), making this language their own through their discussions of the work of a distinguished Australian writer. The protocols for classroom observation that were followed derive from the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN), which positions teachers and academics as collaborators in research on the

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teaching of L-1, with the aim of facilitating comparative research on mother tongue education in various national settings. Rather than judging the work of individual teachers, the aim is to create opportunities for them to reflect on their teaching and to articulate their views and values in dialogue with educators in other countries. The goal of the following article is not simply to present the results of a research project, but to prompt readers to enact the interpretive activities at the heart of this inquiry into the teaching of literature. This article is itself a vehicle for others to join in a wider conversation about the teaching of literature across national boundaries.

**Keywords:** Literature teaching, professional learning, practitioner inquiry, comparative research

### Chinese

[Translation Shek Kam Tse]

文學課堂——對話的空間

摘要：下文呈現了澳大利亞一位中學文學老師的教育理念。通過一系列的數據提供了一個小窗口展現了她的職業實踐，其中包括了她的一位批判性的朋友觀察了這位老師幾天課堂後所做的筆記。這位老師和她的評判朋友分享了她的教學計劃，兩人展開交流，她還記下她的教學反思。

批判性的朋友除了記錄下課堂觀察外，還記下了對她所觀察到的現象的反思，有時候記下針對老師課後對於教學成效反思的再思考。本文正是源於這位老師和她批判性朋友間的職業對話，試圖傳達他們之間持續性對話的意義：他們反饋了從彼此的合作中的收穫。本文不僅捕捉了老師和其批判性朋友間通過持續性對話的職業學習，還有課堂上的交流：學生們對他們所學的課文展開理解性的討論。本文認為一堂好的文學課，要能讓學生展開探索性的對話 (Barnes,

1978)，從而讓課文的主體——「文學」一詞可以公開的接受質疑。教室中的學生以對話的方式不斷調適文學分析的語言 (Bakhtin,

1981)，他們在對一位傑出的澳大利亞作家的作品的討論中形成自己的語言。

教室觀察方案源自國際母語教育網 International Mother Tongue Education Network

(IMEN)。為了促進各國不同環境下的母語教學的比較研究，他們在母語教學研究中將老師和研究者視為合作者。並非是鑒定每位老師的工作，而是通過與其他國家的研究者的交流，為老師們創造機會反饋自己的教學，澄清自己的理念和價值。下文並非簡單呈現一項研究項目的結果，而是讓讀者將這項調查中的解釋性活動運用到文學教學中。這篇文章本身是個媒介，以期讓他人加入到更廣闊的跨國界文學教學的對話中。

### Dutch

[Translation Tanja Janssen]

TITEL: De literatuurles: Ruimte voor dialoog

SAMENVATTING: Het onderstaande artikel bevat het verhaal over de didactiek van een literatuurdocent in een Australische middelbare school. Het geeft een kleine inkijk in haar professionele praktijk, een inkijk geconstrueerd op basis van verschillende data waaronder de aantekeningen gemaakt door een 'critical friend' die de docent gedurende verschillende dagen heeft geobserveerd. De literatuurdocent wisselde haar lesplannen uit met deze 'critical friend' en voerde gesprekken met haar. Daarnaast schreef zij beschouwingen over haar eigen lespraktijk. De 'critical friend' legde haar observaties vast en schreef ook uitgebreide beschouwingen over wat zij geobserveerd had, soms in antwoord op overdenkingen van de docent over het succes van de lessen. Het onderzoek is aldus gestoeld op een dialoog tussen twee professionals: de literatuurdocent en haar 'critical friend'. Dit artikel poogt een indruk te geven van hun voortgaande gesprekken, terwijl zij reflecteren op wat zij geleerd hebben van hun samenwerking.

Dit artikel schetst niet alleen het leerproces dat de docent en haar 'critical friend' doormaakten tijdens hun dialogen, maar geeft ook een beeld van de uitwisselingen die in de klas plaatsvonden, tijdens discussies tussen leerlingen over de tekst die zij bestudeerden. Het allerbeste literatuuronderwijs – zo wordt gesteld in dit artikel – geeft leerlingen de gelegenheid verkennende gesprekken te voeren (Barnes, 1978), waarin

het begrip 'literatuur', als een gewaardeerde verzameling teksten, ter discussie wordt gesteld. De leerlingen in deze klas maken zich de taal van literaire analyse eigen op een dialogische manier (Bakhtin, 1981), door te discussiëren over het werk van een Australische auteur van naam.

De protocollen voor lesobservatie die gebruikt werden, zijn afkomstig van het International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN), dat docenten en onderzoekers ziet als samenwerkende collega's in onderzoek naar het L1-onderwijs, om zo vergelijkend onderzoek naar moedertaalonderwijs in verschillende nationale contexten mogelijk te maken. Het doel is niet om het werk van individuele docenten te beoordelen, maar om hen de gelegenheid te geven op het eigen onderwijs te reflecteren en om hun visies en waarden te verwoorden in dialoog met docenten uit andere landen. Het doel van dit artikel is niet zozeer: het presenteren van de resultaten van een onderzoeksproject, maar veeleer: lezers aanzetten tot de interpretatieve activiteiten die het hart vormen van dit onderzoek naar literatuuronderwijs. Dit artikel wil inspiratiebron zijn en anderen ertoe aanzetten zich te mengen in een gesprek over literatuuronderwijs dat nationale grenzen overschrijdt.

### **Finnish**

[Translation Katri Sarmavuori]

TITTELI: Kirjallisuus luokkahuoneessa: dialogiavauksia

ABSTRAKTI: Seuraava artikkeli kertoo australialaisen toisen asteen koulun kirjallisuuden opettajan pedagogiikasta. Se tarjoaa pienen ikkunan hänen ammattikäytäntönsä tuoden esiin tietoa, joka sisältää 'kriittisen ystävän' muistiinpanoja, kun hän observoi opettajan tunteja useana päivänä. Osallistuva opettaja jakoi tuntuunnielmansa, osallistui keskusteluihin kriittisen ystävänsä kanssa ja kirjoitti päätelmiään opetuksestaan. Luokkaobservointien lisäksi kriittinen ystävä kirjoitti laajempia päätelmiä siitä, mitä hän havaitsi, joskus vastaten opettajan päätelmiin tuntien onnistuneisuudesta. Tutkimus nousi ammatillisesta dialogista opettajan ja hänen kriittisen ystävänsä kanssa. Se kertoo heidän jatkuvasta keskustelustaan, kun he reflektoivat yhteistyöstä oppimaansa.

Tämä artikkeli ei sisällä pelkästään ammatillista oppimista siitä, mitä opettaja ja hänen kriittinen ystävänsä kokivat vuoropuhelunsa kautta vaan myös muutokset, joita tapahtui tämän opettajan luokkahuoneessa, kun hänen oppilaansa kävivät tulkitsevia keskusteluja vastauksena heidän tutkimaansa tekstiin. Paras kirjallisuuden luokkahuone — niin tämä artikkeli julistaa — mahdollistaa opiskelijat tutkivaan puheeseen (Barnes, 1978), missä kirjallisuus teksteinä on avoin kysymyksille. Opiskelijat tässä luokkahuoneessa hyväksyvät kirjallisuusanalyysin kielen dialogisella tavalla (Bakhtin, 1981), tekemällä tästä kielestä heidän omansa keskusteluillaan australialaisen kirjailijan teoksista.

Pöytäkirjat luokan observoinneista ovat peräisin Kansainvälisen Äidinkielen Opetuksen Verkostosta (IMEN), johon kuuluu kieli:n opettajia ja tutkijoita, joiden tarkoituksena on edistää äidinkielen opetuksen vertailevaa tutkimusta vaihtelevissa kansallisissa asetelmissä. Sen sijaan että haluttaisiin arvioida yksittäisten opettajien työtä, tarkoituksena on luoda mahdollisuuksia heille reflektoida opetustaan ja kertoa näkemyksistään ja arvoistaan dialogissa muiden maiden opettajien kanssa. Seuraavan artikkelin tarkoitus ei ole esitellä tutkimushankkeen tuloksia vaan innostaa lukijoita tulkitseviin toimiin kirjallisuuden opetuksesta. Tämän artikkelin tarkoituksena on saada muita mukaan laajempaan keskusteluun kirjallisuuden opetuksesta yli kansallisten rajojen.

### **French**

[Translation Laurence Pasa]

TITRE : Le cours de littérature: des espaces de dialogue

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article rend compte de l'approche pédagogique d'une enseignante de littérature dans un établissement secondaire australien. Il ouvre une petite fenêtre sur sa pratique professionnelle, incluant diverses données, dont les notes prises par « une amie critique » ayant observé l'enseignante en classe durant plusieurs jours. L'enseignante participant à cette étude a confié ses préparations de cours et s'est engagée dans des conversations avec son amie critique, ainsi que dans l'écriture de réflexions sur son enseignement. En plus de l'enregistrement d'observations en classe, l'amie critique a noté, à l'issue de ces observations, ses commentaires détaillés, parfois en réponse aux interrogations de l'enseignante sur l'efficacité de son enseignement. L'étude présente ainsi un dialogue professionnel entre l'enseignante et son amie critique et tente de véhiculer le sens de leurs échanges continus, tandis qu'elles s'interrogeaient sur ce qu'elles avaient appris de leur collaboration.

L'article appréhende non seulement l'apprentissage professionnel dont l'enseignante et son amie critique font l'expérience par leurs échanges, mais également les interactions en classe entre l'enseignante et ses élèves lors de discussions interprétatives autour du texte qu'ils étudient. Les meilleurs cours de littérature

– comme le souligne cet article – permettent à des élèves de s’investir dans des discussions exploratoires (Barnes, 1978), où la notion même du « littéraire », en tant que caractéristique estimée du texte, est interrogée. Les élèves de cette classe s’approprient le vocabulaire de l’analyse littéraire d’une manière dialogique (Bakhtin, 1981) et en font leur propre langage au travers de l’étude de l’œuvre d’un auteur australien reconnu.

Les protocoles d’observation en classe utilisés proviennent du Réseau international d’enseignement de langue maternelle (IMEN), où collaborent des professeurs et des universitaires dans des recherches sur l’enseignement de la langue maternelle, dans le but de mener des études comparatives sur l’enseignement de la langue maternelle dans divers contextes nationaux. Plutôt que d’évaluer le travail de différents professeurs, l’objectif est de les amener à réfléchir sur leur enseignement et d’articuler leurs représentations et leurs valeurs dans un échange entre des enseignants de différents pays. Le but de cet article n’est pas simplement de présenter les résultats d’un projet de recherche, mais d’amener les lecteurs à promouvoir les activités interprétatives qui sont au cœur de cette enquête dans l’enseignement de la littérature. Cet article invite à une réflexion plus large au sujet de l’enseignement de la littérature, au-delà des frontières nationales.

### Greek

[Translation by Panatoya Papoulia Tzelepi]

Τίτλος: Η τάξη της λογοτεχνίας: Χώροι διάλογου

Περίληψη: Το άρθρο που ακολουθεί αποτελεί περιγραφή της παιδαγωγικής μιας δασκάλας της λογοτεχνίας σε ένα δευτεροβάθμιο σχολείο της Αυστραλίας. Αποτελεί ένα μικρό παράθυρο για να δούμε την επαγγελματική της πρακτική και στηρίζεται σε μια σειρά δεδομένων, μεταξύ των οποίων και σε σημειώσεις μιας «κριτικής φίλης» η οποίας παρατηρούσε τη δασκάλα στα μαθήματά της για αρκετές ημέρες. Η δασκάλα μοιράστηκε τα σχέδια των μαθημάτων της και συζήτησε με την «κριτική φίλη» ενώ επίσης έγραψε αναστοχαστικά για τη διδασκαλία της.

Η κριτική φίλη, επιπλέον της καταγραφής των παρατηρήσεων του μαθήματος, έγραψε εκτενείς στοχασμούς σχετικά με όσα είδε, μερικές φορές ως απάντηση στις σκέψεις της δασκάλας σχετικά με την επιτυχία της διδασκαλίας. Ως εκ τούτου η μελέτη πήγαζε από ένα επαγγελματικό διάλογο μεταξύ της δασκάλας και της «κριτικής φίλης» της και προσπαθεί να αποδώσει την αίσθηση της συνεχούς συνομιλίας τους, καθώς στοχάζονται αυτό που έμαθαν από τη συνεργασία τους.

Το άρθρο συλλαμβάνει όχι μόνο την επαγγελματική μάθηση την οποία η δασκάλα και η φίλη της κατέκτησαν μέσω του συνεχούς διαλόγου τους, αλλά και τις ανταλλαγές που έγιναν στην τάξη αυτής της δασκάλας, καθώς οι μαθητές της ασχολήθηκαν με αναλυτικές συζητήσεις για τα κείμενα τα οποία μελετούσαν. Οι άριστες τάξεις λογοτεχνίας – έτσι ισχυρίζεται αυτό το άρθρο – επιτρέπουν στους μαθητές να εμπλακούν σε διερευνητικές συζητήσεις (Barnes, 1978) όπου η ίδια η ιδέα της «λογοτεχνίας» ως ένα αξιοσέβαστο σώμα κειμένων, είναι ανοιχτή σε διερεύνηση. Οι μαθητές σε αυτή την τάξη κατακτούν τη γλώσσα μέσω των συζητήσεων πάνω στο έργο ενός διακεκριμένου Αυστραλιανού συγγραφέα.

Τα πρωτόκολλα παρατήρησης της τάξης που ακολουθήθηκαν προέρχονται από το International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN), το οποίο τοποθετεί δασκάλους και πανεπιστημιακούς ως συνεργάτες στην έρευνα της διδασκαλίας της μητρικής γλώσσας με στόχο τη διευκόλυνση της συγκριτικής έρευνας σε ποικίλα εθνικά πλαίσια. Αντί να κρίνεται η εργασία του κάθε δασκάλου, ο στόχος είναι να δημιουργούνται ευκαιρίες να στοχάζονται πάνω στη διδασκαλία τους και να αρθρώνουν τις απόψεις και τις αξίες τους σε διάλογο με εκπαιδευτικούς σε άλλες χώρες. Ο στόχος αυτού του άρθρου δεν είναι απλά να παρουσιάσει τα αποτελέσματα μιας έρευνας, αλλά να παρακινήσει τους αναγνώστες του να πραγματοποιήσουν τις ερμηνευτικές δραστηριότητες, που είναι στο κέντρο αυτής της έρευνας, μέσα στο μάθημά τους της λογοτεχνίας. Αυτό το άρθρο είναι ένα όχημα για τους δασκάλους να εμπλακούν σε μια ευρύτερη συζήτηση σχετικά με τη διδασκαλία της λογοτεχνίας πέρα από τα εθνικά σύνορα.

### Italian

[Translation Manuela Delfino, Francesco Caviglia]

TITOLO: L’ora di letteratura: spazi di dialogo

SINTESI: L’articolo che segue presenta un resoconto dell’approccio pedagogico di una docente di letteratura in una scuola secondaria australiana. Mostra uno spaccato della sua pratica professionale e, per farlo, ricorre ad una serie di dati che comprendono le note prese da una “osservatrice critica amica” che ha seguito la docente nell’arco di alcuni giorni di lezione. La docente ha condiviso la progettazione delle

lezioni e ne ha discusso con l'osservatrice che, a sua volta, ha scritto alcune riflessioni. In aggiunta alle osservazioni annotate in classe, l'osservatrice ha tenuto traccia di riflessioni più estese su quanto osservato, talvolta in risposta alle riflessioni della docente in merito al successo delle lezioni. Lo studio, quindi, è il risultato di un dialogo professionale tra la docente e l'osservatrice amica e si pone l'obiettivo di trasmettere il senso del loro dialogo costante, nel momento in cui riflettono su ciò che hanno appreso dalla loro collaborazione.

L'articolo non riporta soltanto l'apprendimento dal punto di vista professionale che la docente e l'osservatrice hanno sperimentato durante il dialogo continuo, ma anche gli scambi che sono avvenuti nell'ora di lezione della docente, nel momento in cui gli studenti erano alle prese con la discussione sull'interpretazione dei brani che stavano studiando. Le migliori lezioni di letteratura in classe – sostiene questo articolo – sono quelle che impegnano gli studenti in *discussioni esplorative* (*exploratory talk*, Barnes, 1978), in cui la stessa nozione di 'letteratura', intesa come corpus di testi di valore, è oggetto di discussione. Gli studenti in queste lezioni si appropriano del linguaggio dell'analisi letteraria in maniera dialogica (Bakhtin, 1981), facendo proprio questo linguaggio attraverso la discussione dell'opera di un importante scrittore australiano.

Lo schema seguito per l'osservazione in aula deriva dal Network Internazionale per l'Insegnamento della Madre Lingua (International Mother Tongue Education Network - IMEN) che coinvolge docenti e accademici nella collaborazione in ricerche sull'insegnamento della L1, con l'obiettivo di agevolare ricerche comparative sulla didattica della lingua madre in varie esperienze condotte a livello nazionale. Più che giudicare il lavoro condotto da singoli docenti, l'obiettivo è di creare opportunità di riflessione sulle loro modalità di insegnamento e di confrontarsi sui loro modi di vedere e sui loro valori, dialogando con docenti di altri paesi. Lo scopo dell'articolo non è solo quello di presentare i risultati di un progetto di ricerca, ma di sollecitare i lettori a realizzare in proprio le attività volte all'interpretazione che sono alla base di questa ricerca sulla didattica della letteratura. Questo stesso articolo vuol essere un veicolo perché altre persone si uniscano in un più ampio dialogo sull'insegnamento della letteratura che vada oltre i confini nazionali.

#### Polish

[Translation Elżbieta Awramiuk]

TITUL: LEKCJA LITERATURY: PRZESTRZEŃ DIALOGU

STRESZCZENIE: Niniejszy artykuł przybliża warsztat pedagogiczny nauczycielki literatury w australijskiej szkole średniej. Daje wgląd w jej zawodowe działania, poprzez wykorzystanie różnorodnych danych, m.in. uwag sformułowanych przez „krytycznego przyjaciela” (osobę hospitującą), która przez kilka dni obserwowała nauczycielkę podczas lekcji. Nauczycielka prezentowała plan lekcji (konspekt) i dyskutowała z „krytycznym przyjacielem”, jak również notowała własne refleksje na temat swej pracy. Dodatkowo podczas klasowych obserwacji „krytyczny przyjaciel” zapisywał rozbudowane refleksje na temat tego, co obserwował, czasami w odniesieniu do autorefleksji prowadzącej na temat powodzenia lekcji. Niniejsze studium rejestruje zawodowy dialog między nauczycielką i osobą hospitującą oraz podejmuje próbę określenia sensu ich konwersacji, w czasie której zastanawiają się nad tym, co ta współpraca im dała.

Artykuł uwzględnia nie tylko proces zawodowego uczenia się nauczycielki i osoby hospitującej podczas toczących się między nimi dyskusji, ale także wymiany zdań, jaka nastąpiła między nauczycielką a jej uczniami podczas interpretacji tekstu, który studiowali. Jak twierdzimy w tym artykule, bardzo dobre lekcje literatury pozwalają uczniom zaangażować się w pogadankę heurystyczną (Barnes, 1978), w której ich pojęcie literatury, podobnie jak analizowane teksty, są stawiane pod znakiem zapytania. Uczniowie w tej klasie stosowali język analizy literackiej poprzez dialog (Bakhtin, 1981), czyniąc ten język ich własnym w trakcie dyskusji nad utworem wybranego pisarza australijskiego.

Wykorzystywane podczas hospitacji protokoły pochodzą z *International Mother Tongue Education Network* (IMEN), stowarzyszenia, które zaleca współpracę między nauczycielami i nauczycielkami akademickimi w badaniach nad nauczaniem L1 i które za cel stawia sobie ułatwienie badań porównawczych nad językiem ojczystym w różnych wariantach narodowych. Celem obserwacji jest nie tyle ocena indywidualnej pracy nauczyciela, ile danie nauczycielom możliwości autorefleksji oraz prezentacji ich poglądów i ich systemu wartości w dialogu z edukatorami z innych krajów. Celem niniejszego artykułu nie jest prosta prezentacja wyników projektu badawczego, ale zachęcenie czytelników do wykorzystywania ćwiczeń interpretacyjnych, o których tu mowa, w nauczaniu literatury. Artykuł ten jest wezwaniem dla innych, aby dołączyli do szerszej dyskusji na temat nauczania literatury ponad podziałami narodowymi.

**Spanish**

[Translation Ingrid Marquez]

TÍTULO : La literatura en el salón de clase: espacios para el diálogo

RESUMEN: El artículo que sigue construye la historia de la pedagogía de una maestra de literatura en una escuela secundaria australiana. Nos permite un vistazo de su práctica profesional, además de basarse en un amplio rango de datos que incluyen apuntes hechos por una “amiga crítica” que observaba a la maestra mientras impartía clases durante varios días. La maestra compartía sus planes de clase y conversaba con su amiga, quien apuntaba sus reflexiones acerca de su manera de enseñar. Además de registrar observaciones en el salón, la amiga crítica escribió comentarios extensos sobre lo que observaba, a veces como respuesta a las continuas reflexiones de la maestra acerca de la eficacia de sus lecciones. Así, el estudio surge de un diálogo profesional entre la maestra y su amiga crítica, e intenta expresar el sentido de su conversación continua conforme reflexionan sobre lo que han aprendido de la colaboración.

El artículo capta no sólo el aprendizaje profesional que experimentan la maestra y su amiga crítica a través de su diálogo constante, sino los intercambios que ocurrieron en el salón de clase cuando los estudiantes participaban en pláticas interpretativas acerca del texto que estudiaban. Lo que sostiene el artículo es que los mejores cursos de literatura permiten que los estudiantes se involucren en un diálogo exploratorio (Barnes, 1978) en el cual la noción misma de “literatura” como cierto conjunto de textos respetados es tema de discusión. En el salón, los estudiantes adoptan el lenguaje del análisis literario como un diálogo (Bakhtin, 1981), apropiando este lenguaje a través de sus pláticas acerca de las obras de un escritor australiano de renombre.

El protocolo de las observaciones en clase se derivó de la Red de Educación Internacional en Lengua Materna (IMEN), que posiciona al maestro y a la academia como investigadores colaboradores en la enseñanza de L-1, con el propósito de facilitar la investigación comparativa sobre la educación de lengua materna en varios ambientes nacionales. En vez de evaluar el trabajo de maestros individuales, el objetivo es crear oportunidades para que todos reflexionen sobre su enseñanza y expresen sus perspectivas y valores al dialogar con educadores de otros países. La meta del artículo no es sólo presentar los resultados del proyecto de investigación sino motivar al lector a probar las actividades interactivas que forman el meollo de esta investigación de la enseñanza de literatura. El artículo en sí es un vehículo para que otros participen en una conversación más amplia acerca de la enseñanza de la literatura que vaya más allá de las fronteras nacionales.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It's 'Jeans for Genes Charity Fundraising Day' and students stroll into class in an array of fashionable colours; 'Ugh' Boots, Nike sneakers, green Doc Martins, rainbow socks among green school and sports uniforms. Around the room students set up laptops and apply lip stick, lip gloss and Blistex.

The walls at the back of the room are covered in large colourful Year 10 posters of Lady Macbeth – 'Come, thick night', 'What's Done cannot be Undone', 'Women's Power'. The classroom chairs are arranged in a circle.

As they stroll into class students take a seat inside the circle. Some of them go to Prue and they become absorbed in conversations about their essays, passages or other matters:

'I've done a bit, but it's not coming together...can I talk to you about it?'

'Can I send you a work in progress?'

Prue (quietly) '...I haven't received your...can we talk about it after class?'

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Australian English teachers would recognize many of the details recorded here: the charity fundraising day, when for a small fee students are allowed to dress casually, rather than wearing their school uniforms; the posters on the wall depicting Lady

Macbeth, prompting students to think about significant themes within the text; the mildly anxious requests by individual students for their teacher to read a draft of their work before handing it in for assessment. These details evoke a sense of the social relationships that sustain the learning in this classroom. Yet their very concreteness resists any attempt to confidently ascribe meaning to these incidents; it would certainly be wrong to elevate this scene into an image of the start of a typical English lesson in an Australian school. The fact that these events are occurring in a particular place at a particular time registers the deeply situated nature of any teacher's professional practice, making it difficult to generalise from this scene to any large claim about the way English is currently being taught in Australian schools. The standpoint of the observer, who is seeing this class for the first time, conveys a sense of puzzlement as much as recognition. Rather than simply inviting other experienced teachers to assimilate these details into the familiarity of their everyday routines, these notes raise questions: What is happening here? How do I know? How do I feel about the way this teacher approaches her lessons? What other information do I require in order to understand this scene? How am I reading this classroom? What perspectives are shaping my interpretation of *this* text?

This article explores the pedagogy of a secondary English teacher in Melbourne, as she gives a series of lessons on short stories by Beverley Farmer, a contemporary Australian author whose work has been much celebrated for her exploration of the interior world of women. The aim of this article is not simply to record what happened in her classroom, as though it might be reduced to a story that reflects the 'truth of the matter' (cf. Phillips and Burbules, 2000, p.78). The bare bones of the events that form the basis of this article are that Prue Gill, a very accomplished teacher of literature in an all-girls private school in Melbourne, agreed to allow Bella Illesca to observe her teaching a class of around 15 students aged around 16-17, over a period of about a fortnight. (Yet even these details pose interpretive difficulties. The phenomenon of an elite private school, where parents pay substantial fees for their daughters to attend, and where students can choose to study Literature, in addition to completing another subject called 'English', which has a stronger emphasis on language for communicative purposes, will no doubt seem strange to readers in other national settings.) Prior to Bella's visits to her classroom, Prue explained what she was trying to achieve in her lessons, and both Bella and Prue wrote a series of reflections from their respective viewpoints, trying to identify the matches and mismatches between the planned curriculum and the curriculum that was actually implemented, as Prue interacted with her students in the course of the lessons (cf. Barnes, 1978). For the purpose of writing this article, they engaged in further reflections and interpretive discussions in response to the data that was originally collected. You might say that this article combines their interpretations of their interpretations of the original events, and forms part of their continuing conversation about what it means to teach literature.

A significant Australian precedent for this kind of classroom observation is provided by Garth Boomer's essay, 'English Teaching: Art and Science', in which he extols the work of 'Mrs Bell', an English teacher whom he variously describes as 'Indweller / Imaginer / Psychologist' and 'Experimenter / Theoretician / Scientist', 'Metaphysicist / Illuminator / Commentator', not to mention other roles he identifies

(Boomer, 1984, rpt., 1998). Thus Boomer highlights the multifaceted nature of the work of an English teacher. Yet Boomer's essay also brings to mind one of the risks involved in celebrating the knowledge and practice of teachers, namely a tendency to resort to a romantic celebration of their work vis-à-vis the reifying methods of 'scientific' analysis. Boomer has been criticized for elevating Mrs Bell to almost superhuman status, to an impossible ideal that could only cause many teachers to despair about the dull ordinariness of their professional lives (see Howes, 1998). Also relevant here are more recent celebrations of teachers' work that have a distinctly romantic tone, such as Connelly and Clandinen's invocation of teachers' 'experience' as a focus for 'narrative inquiry' (Connelly and Clandinen, 2000). Although it is not difficult to understand why Connelly and Clandinen might wish to posit 'experience' in contradistinction to the knowledge claims made by more traditional forms of research, it is also hardly surprising when researchers working within such frameworks reject their 'interpretive' methods and assert that there is a 'truth' to the matter that can be established through 'scientific' inquiry (see Phillips and Burbules, 2000, p.78-82).

In contrast to Boomer's famous essay, which, for all its celebratory tone, is still written *about* Mrs Bell from the point of view of an all-knowing researcher and educator, this article combines the voices of the teacher, her critical friend and the two academics who facilitated this inquiry. It should already be apparent that we are deeply critical of post-positivist claims to be able to establish 'the truth' of what occurs in classrooms, as distinct from the 'interpretations' of those events on the part of teachers, students and other observers (cf. Phillips and Burbules, 2000, p.78). Yet this does not mean embracing some kind of postmodernist relativism which uncritically celebrates a multiplicity of interpretations without addressing the role that the teaching of literature should play in schools and the public sphere. The commitment of Prue Gill and Bella Illesca, as well as Piet-Hein Van de Ven and Brenton Doecke, the two academics who formed part of the research team, to sustained inquiry into the nature of literature teaching will be shown by the texts of the conversations and classroom observations assembled here. The teaching of literature is not some kind of trivial pursuit or middle class indulgence. For all the scepticism that 'theory' (Culler, 2007) has taught us to exercise when it comes to invoking any notion of what it means to be human, we maintain that the interpretive activities in which Prue Gill's students engage reflect a human impulse to understand their world and to make sense of their lives.

At the heart of this inquiry lies Prue Gill's preparedness to allow Bella Illesca to observe her teaching and to engage in dialogue about what she was trying to accomplish. The data that Bella collected will be reviewed in the second section of this article, in the form of a fairly traditional analysis written from the perspective of an academic commentator or researcher, whose 'voice' is not really located in a particular time and place. This analysis has, however, been reviewed by all the authors, and it should not be privileged in relation to the other perspectives presented in this article.

The third and fourth sections of this article take a different form. In section three, Prue and Bella revisit the data collected and present a meta-commentary that attempts to capture what they learnt through their exchanges with one another. Be-

cause they wrote these reflections several months after the classroom observations occurred, they are able to exercise a critical distance that was not initially available to them. In section four, Piet-Hein and Brenton reflect on what they in turn have learnt by participating in this project.

## 2. AN INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITY

Our aim in this section is to capture the quality of the dialogue in Prue Gill's classroom. As Bella's notes indicate, the start of the lesson is characterised by a slow transition from the social world of recess to the work which is scheduled for today. Bella continues with her observations:

Students generally sit and begin to take out their workbooks or notes for that lesson and chat amongst themselves and/or call out things to Prue.

'Miss, I've highlighted...'

'Rosemary is here, but she's slack...'

Prue: 'I hope that J & A are here...those of you here may like to hand around your passage.'

'Miss, we have to leave class 10 minutes earlier because we have cheerleading practice.'

A couple of girls with arms and legs outstretched are comparing skin colour and jokingly ask each other:

'Who's the yellowest?'

'You're the yellow peril you yellow pole'

'I forged my mother's signature to learn the bassoon when I was in grade 6. They didn't find out until they charged my mum...'

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Prue herself, in a conversation with Bella directly after this lesson is over, describes the beginning as 'messy'. Yet although she appears to be critical of her own manner – 'I hate to say it, but I reckon that's a characteristic of every one of my classes' – she also offers a rationale for her approach:

The edge between play and the classroom is so unclear. And I mean I don't say it as something I'm proud of. I'm not really proud of it. Except that I can see that it has another purpose because those edges are really artificial anyway, aren't they?

Prue Gill, Excerpt from taped conversation with Bella Illesca, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Throughout the exchanges recorded in this lesson, there exists a tension between the 'official' business of the lesson and this other 'purpose'. For all the apparent ease with which the students saunter into class and parade their tastes through their 'Ugh Boots, Nike sneakers, green Doc Martins, rainbow socks', several are keen for Prue to read drafts of their work – a common practice in Australian schools, where students are typically sensitised to the value of drafting and the importance of receiving

feedback. The Literature class that Bella is observing is, in fact, highly regulated by a set of controls which ensure that any work the students produce in the course of the year is recorded and assessed. The cycle of the year is marked by a series of classroom tests, in which students are required to produce written work under exam conditions, and in the final term they all do an examination which constitutes 50% of their grade (because their classroom tests are statistically moderated against their examination result, the exam actually carries far more weight). At the end of the year, the students each receive a grade for Literature, a subject in their Victorian Certificate of Education (or Matriculation), which because of its academic content is weighted to earn more credit for the purposes of university entrance than 'easy' subjects such as Media Studies or Art.

The 'purpose' to which Prue refers in her conversation with Bella is not the cycle of curriculum delivery and assessment that will eventually result in the students successfully completing their Matriculation, though it would be wrong to suggest that these mandated practices do not provide a framework for the interpretive work that Prue names when she articulates her aims to Bella. We are not trying to set up a hard and fast binary between traditional kinds of regulation and some form of creativity that challenges classroom boundaries. As Prue remarks, the 'edge between play and the classroom is so unclear'. Prue's own sense of purpose, however, is focused on the capacity of her students to begin to read closely and critically, not simply giving them the skills to do the exam. Here is what she wrote in her reflections before Bella and she had had the conversation mentioned above:

We're doing the stories of Beverley Farmer. At this stage I am trying to get students to approach the stories via the passages – to increase their confidence in moving from the particular to the general – the approach they need to feel confident of in the exam, i.e. students have really been given this as a passage analysis task. They have been asked to identify a passage for discussion – and to use that as the basis for a discussion of the whole story. I've allocated stories to pairs or threes, and they are to make a class presentation on the whole, via the discussion of a passage. My prediction is that this will be quite difficult for them, that they will not find a great deal to say via the passage, and that I'll have to move them along quite a bit.

I'll be interested to see whether they draw on language and stylistic features in their discussion as well as IDEAS.

I imagine that my role will be to ask the questions that helps them move from passage to story to work as a whole.

Prue Gill, Reflections before Classroom Observation, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2004

This is, indeed, far more than training for an examination, but relates to the logic of interpretive analysis, as readers endeavour to make sense of a passage within their emerging sense of the whole story. Rather than rushing to judgment about the meaning of the story, the students are being encouraged to weigh up each detail, reflecting on how it might affect their understanding of the narrative. They are also being sensitised to the way each moment in a story contributes to a sense of its narrative unity, which in turn provides a framework for understanding the significance of the concrete details presented in the text. Prue later reflects:

Something I said to Bella in our discussion after the class which I've thought about later. We were talking about 'aims', 'objectives', 'outcomes' and I rather flippantly said my aim was that we would progress further in our journey of using literature to raise important questions about self, other, politics, values, context, understanding and so on. And of developing our notion of critical literacy and thinking. I sometimes think that the 'aims and objectives' imperative (that these are necessary for every class) is another form of box ticking, and no determinant of professionalism. I think my response to Bella stemmed from there. But of course thinking about it, I did have clear aims – and they are to do with developing the skills of critical literacy, developing student confidence in close passage work, listening, speaking, enjoying being part of a discussion that helps us reflect on very interesting approaches to living.

Prue Gill, Reflections after Classroom Observation, Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2004

At the centre of Prue's pedagogy as a teacher of literature is a recognition of the way that ideas are mediated by language and the stylistic features of the text – that the theme of any novel or story cannot simply be extracted from the text for all to see, but can only be understood as it is mediated by words and a provisional understanding of the unity of the text. The discussions between students that Bella records in her notebook typically focus on the words of the story they are reading (as one group notes: 'Farmer paints a picture in colours. Very striking and disturbing. "Red velvet" and "quilt", "ink" foreshadow blood...').

Yet the distinctive character of Prue's pedagogy does not consist only in her refined understanding of the complex play between words and meaning in literary texts. What would have happened, for example, if she had asked her students to engage in some very traditional classroom routines, such as individual written work where students are required to 'explain in their own words' (the injunction that usually accompanies comprehension exercises) the meaning of selected passages? Would such practices have served her 'purpose' equally well? Given the ways Prue's pedagogy is mediated by the demands imposed by a competitive academic curriculum, it is hardly surprising to find that she feels obliged to give her students the skills to write under exam conditions and to meet the criteria for assessment imposed by an external authority (in her reflections she is very aware of the need to make her students feel 'confident' in the exam). For all these constraints, however, she remains committed to creating opportunities for students to engage in conversations in which they can explore the complexities of language and meaning. And such conversations are conceived not only as a means to an end, but as central to the activity of reading and interpreting, of grappling with the nuances of words, of probing the meaning of a literary work. In a further conversation with Bella, she explains why 'conversation' (as she understands this word) is a necessary vehicle for engaging with texts:

The theory that underpins the whole literature course is that theory that suggests that we are each inevitably, inextricably going to be bringing values and assumptions of our own to a reading of the text and so that we're always going to have a conversation about a text. And I think I've introduced that theory to students at the beginning of the year, but also you reinforce it in a thousand little ways. And I assume there are going to be multiple perspectives. So at one stage I said when you read these readings you will focus on different things, that's why it's good to talk about it. But also because it's inevitable that some people will see something that they latch onto. We didn't spend time dwelling on that, but we could have. But in a way I almost take it for granted at this

point that they're going to acknowledge that they're not looking for agreement with each other; they're looking for a conversation with each other, a discussion. But, they've also learned that they've got to justify how they arrive at the position they arrive at. So that you might actually persuade someone else that they've missed something. But I assume underpinning the whole thing is that there are going to be multiple perspectives on the text... And in a way that it's the conversation you have about the text, just as the conversation you have about your own writing, that is in part illuminating in terms of understanding how language works, in terms of understanding how a reader is positioned in some way, in terms of thinking afresh about your perspectives of the world, in terms of having your own perspectives challenged.

Prue Gill, Excerpt from taped conversation with Bella Illesca (16<sup>th</sup> August, 2004)

The conversations between the students that Bella recorded evince the qualities that Prue desires. This is not to say that they are replete with sophisticated insights into the imaginative worlds Beverley Farmer creates in her short stories. The students are clearly learning how to make provisional generalisations about a text on the basis of the detail presented to them. The stories discussed were 'Pumpkin' and 'A Woman with Black Hair', and it is apparent that the students find some aspects of Farmer's representation of men unsettling, even confronting:

- Student 1: Maybe we should ask Beverly what was on her mind when she wrote this?
- Student 2: I said, like yeah, hello. Men are not all this evil. Yes there are some tools out there but not all men are women beaters and porn kings. Get on with your life! The reason you're separated from your child is because you didn't get a lawyer! She's annoying... I want to smash her head in because ...so bleak...just because she came from a traditional background...
- Prue: Let's continue thematic exploration about...
- Student 1: ...from now on it's about...
- Student 2: I don't think that it's entirely accurate in the story. For example, I have an issue with the way everything is so difficult, alienating...
- Student 3: I think the fact that I read all 40 of her stories and wanted to shoot myself...if I'd only read a couple...
- Student 2: Oh my god. I'm worried about her safety this afternoon.
- Student 3: What was going through her head? She drives me mad...Life isn't that bad
- Student 2: Beverley Farmer is anti feminist because the only time that men are okay is when they take on a woman's role.

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 16<sup>th</sup> August 2004

This stretch of conversation also shows how the interpretive discussions of the students are mediated by the social relationships in the classroom. The students know each other, and they are using Farmer's text to raise questions about the role they imagine themselves playing as women in contemporary Australian society. This conversation takes us back to the point where we began this discussion, namely the blurred boundaries between the school yard and the social space of the classroom. Prue makes the following remark about how to an outsider their conversations might

appear to drift in and out of focus. The students are given a great deal of autonomy when participating in discussion groups, and as the teacher Prue essentially limits herself to walking around the classroom, attending to the conversations in each group, and judging whether or not to intervene in the discussion:

You're always making a judgment about how much you intervene in what they're doing and whether it's actually going to be better to keep them on track, or whether you can basically trust that they're going to come back on track. And you know that they're going to be talking, they're going to pepper their conversation with other things. I mean this is the generation who watch three programs at once and then tell you what each one of them is about. You know that they're going to slip off into other things... I do sometimes think that if I were a bit more riveting, you know, if what we were doing was absolutely riveting to them that wouldn't happen. But on the other hand literature is... You're always bringing yourself into your literary study... Because really the subject is very much also about them understanding their own views and their own values and their own ways of seeing. And so it's a bit artificial that division, you know, of not being able to bring your own life in the task.

Prue Gill, Excerpt from Taped Conversation with Bella Illesca (16<sup>th</sup> August, 2004)

How, then, might we characterise the quality of the dialogue in Prue's classroom? Dialogue is indeed at the centre of her pedagogy, which explains why an outside observer might see her classroom as 'messy'. The start of the lesson is characterised less by a clear demarcation between the students' recess time conversations and the main business of the lesson, than a folding of one conversation into another. This is because the social relationships in which the students are engaged provide an indispensable context for their classroom activities. By reading the stories of Beverley Farmer they are sent back to their own attitudes and values as young women in Australian society.

Despite what an observer might judge to be a 'messy' start to the lesson, Prue had done the preparation that 'counts', namely (what she describes in her reflections of 8<sup>th</sup> August as), 'the conceptual mulling over, thinking through of what it is that is important in this task of analysing language and experience as they represent a particular world in the story of Beverley Farmer'. The dialogue in this class – for all its apparent 'freedom' and lack of a clear dividing line between school yard and classroom – does not occur without very careful planning, both the conceptual mulling over that Prue mentions and the nitty-gritty of orchestrating the groups (at the start of the lesson Prue had in fact been obliged to run off to do some photocopying because one group had forgotten to bring multiple copies of their chosen passage to class). Prue comments in her reflections that 'the walls of the classroom are an artificial barrier', that 'the business of the classroom should be life (of which recess is a part)', and on the way 'institutional structures engrain the boundaries of the classroom'. Yet the focused nature of the dialogue between the students in her classrooms, involving the provision of a language to make generalisations on the basis of a close reading of the details of Farmer's texts, can only be explained in terms of 'structures' that she has put in place.

### 3. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Classrooms are always richer than what you see taking place in any particular class on a particular day. Indeed, as Dorothy Smith argues (Smith, 2005), what you ‘see’ when you participate in an institutional setting is mediated by a range of factors, including – in the case of this particular classroom – the policy mandates that obtain at a state level, the senior literature curriculum, the socio-economic status of the school community, the history of the teaching of literature in Australian schools, as well as recent debates about ‘theory’ (Culler, 2007). To ‘see’ what is happening in this classroom means tracing the larger network of relationships and contexts in which these activities occur, and understanding those events relationally (Smith, 2005). For Prue Gill to fully understand her professional practice – and for other members of the research team to likewise understand what she is doing – involves externalising her knowledge and values, and making her habitual practices an object of scrutiny. This means stepping beyond the everyday, and reflecting on the determinants of her professional practice. But this interpretive activity has a diachronic character as well as a synchronic one. Those factors shaping Prue’s professional practice are not simply there to be grasped once and for all. They can only be understood through continuing inquiry. The significance of any event does not simply inhere within it, but is the product of continuing reflection and reinterpretation.

This section consists of a further set of reflections by Prue Gill and Bella Illesca which they composed several months after the data was originally collected. They revisit several of the incidents that have been considered in the previous discussion, thereby providing another level of interpretation of the exchanges that occurred between the students. The aim of this section and the following one is to present the individual ‘voices’ of the research team in continuing dialogue with one another as they each seek to understand Prue’s professional practice. The focus is now on the dialogue that *surrounds* the classroom (not simply the dialogue occurring *within* it) in the form of continuing conversations between Prue and Bella, and then Piet-Hein and Brenton, as well as the discussion that has occurred between all four of them in the course of writing this article.

#### 3.1 Prue (the Teacher)

When Bella came for the first classroom observation, things did not go exactly as planned. The class gradually arrived, the only group which hadn’t done its photocopying was the one to start, and the lead-in was not quite as I envisaged. But neither did I experience it in the same way as Bella. Her sharp ears picked up the sort of skylarking and play which I scarcely noticed, and rarely tune into. This is what she wrote in her notes which she showed me as a prompt for reflection in our discussions after the lesson:

‘Who’s the yellowest?’ (three girls matching their skin alongside each other)

‘You’re the yellow peril, you yellow Pole’

'I forged my mother's signature to learn the bassoon when I was in grade 6. They didn't find out until they charged my mum...'

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

*Really?* I think. Did this exchange really occur?

I told Bella that by giving less power to the bell, I relinquish my authority in some ways, and as I write now, I'm spurred to stop and think about whether this is purposeful and therefore professional, or happenstance, and therefore unprofessional. What would make it slip from one category into the other? How might it be seen by others? One of the things I say to students at the beginning of the year, when they are new and fresh and keen, is that my first aim is that they enjoy walking through the door. I picture them thinking, as the bell goes for the end of the class before, 'Oh good, it's Literature now'. I wonder now about their preferred entrée into the classroom. I've never asked them if they'd rather have more order.

Bella also commented in her original observation notes on what she thought of as the 'freedom' in the room, and she mentioned this several times. I haven't thought about it as freedom, despite the fact that I've earlier mentioned 'relinquishing authority'. I've thought about it as the ebb and flow, give and take. There are times when the class is distracted from the literary conversation, loses focus. But this is balanced by the times when they fall over each other to say something about the passage under discussion. They don't usually put up their hands to speak, they take turns as one does in conversation. But when a whole lot of students are itching to say something, then they raise their hands, and they know that I'll try and call them in order. There are several times when it happens in this class. In the transcript of our conversation afterwards, Bella puts it this way:

They were all sort of tripping over each other's ideas and they were taking each other's ideas and kept building on them, and some of them took them off in a completely different direction.

Bella Illesca, Excerpt from taped conversation with Prue Gill (6<sup>th</sup> August, 2004)

When this sort of thing happens in the classroom, I feel a flush of adrenalin that reminds me why I like teaching so much. Here is a fragment of one such conversation which Bella recorded in the observation notes which she gave to me. The story we are reading is 'Pumpkin' and it reveals the emerging tensions in the marriage of Barbara (Australian, intellectual, a little sophisticated) and Andoni, her Greek husband. They are staying together in Andoni's family home in a Greek mainland coastal village. Each is seeing the other in a new context – neither is sure that they like what they see. Andoni is shocked to learn that Barbara dyes her hair, even though she informs him that his own sisters do too. Rather than just take the story and study it as an integrated whole on its own, the aim of our discussion is to examine the writing of Farmer, her concerns as a writer, her slant on things.

One of the students has just used the term 'good woman' in her comment:

- Prue: The 'good woman' – this raises the issue of what?... is there a fear that the wife will slip into another category? What might Farmer be saying?
- Student 1: That [for Andoni] it's what people *think* that matters. Not what you do...it's what *seems* that matters.
- Prue: What might Farmer think about this attitude?
- Student 2: Would Barbara be angry because of his lack of honesty? You can't judge a person because of dyed hair! There's a sense of where two principles are juxtaposed...
- Student 3: The principle of being the good woman
- Student 4: The principle of being the woman who is *seen* to be a good woman.
- Student 5: The *Greek* is automatically a good woman. Barbara has to assimilate – to become good.
- Student 6: Her honesty and goodness [versus] keeping up appearances.
- Prue For her, the openness is a virtue. For him it's . . .
- Prue/Student 3: A *shame* (student and Prue finish the same sentence)

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

We could have talked about how we see Andoni –whether we're critical of him because we're seeing the story through the eyes of Barbara, or whether there's a way of resisting Barbara's will here and actually seeing Barbara as being a little bit jealous and a little bit too smart. We didn't get time. I made a mental note to have that discussion at another time. This passage, only 20 or 30 lines, led to a great deal of exploratory talk. At this point, there was no need to tie up ends. Students will have to develop a reading of their own later on. In this activity, we were modeling the sort of reading that they might need to employ if they are to justify their own interpretation.

We move to another story – 'A Woman with Black Hair'. The students presenting this story have chosen the very opening passage to discuss – it is the view of the sleeping household that a rapist has as he slips in through an unlocked door. It is a very cold and detailed observation. As we first read we have no idea that it is a predator's view that we have. But for each of us, as we speak now, we are examining the passage with hindsight. We know what happens. I am pleased by the observations that are being made about the writing:

- Student 4: Weird [that] she uses brackets like that. What's the purpose?
- Student 1: Unnecessary information.
- Student 2: Like a side note...in the first person. Makes it more intimate, don't you think?
- Student 3: Do words in brackets give a different view into his psyche?
- Student 4: Maybe it's the narrator?
- Student 5: I think it's like a monologue. I think it's like a play. Like stage directions...to set the mood.

- Prue: How does it work differently from earlier images?
- Student 1: This is something he knows
- Student 3: Farmer paints a picture in colours. Very striking and disturbing ; 'red velvet' and 'quilt', 'ink' - foreshadow blood. Children's essays and poem tell us she's a teacher...but he hasn't made a connection. She's just a woman with black hair.
- Student 2: The tone is very detached. It's unsettling.
- Prue: How do you locate 'unsettling'?
- Student 3: Through detachment. [He is] not emotionally engaged with this at all.

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

I'm also pleased by their preparedness to be exploratory in this talk. Looking now at the flow of talk, I can see that students were listening to each other; they're reflecting, questioning, validating, trying ideas out without the need to pin things down as true or false, right or wrong. A little later, when they are looking at a link between 'Pumpkin' and 'A Woman with Black Hair', someone said that perhaps the rapist in 'A Woman with Black Hair' was a far extreme of the chauvinist Andoni in 'Pumpkin'. I told them about the feminist notion that the power of all men is reinforced by the fact that some men rape. It was a challenging idea for them to think about, and you have to be so careful about the way you thread it into the discussion, so it doesn't become threatening to their own sense of self. But it is interesting that they could all deal with the idea in this context. In another context it might have been aggressively responded to - because it is a provocative idea. I was trying it out on them - again, not looking for right or wrong, for acceptance or rejection, simply wanting them to understand that if they are studying literature like this, it is a theory they might grapple with.

I want to point out that I have changed my thinking about the relationship between form and content in recent years. I used to think that ideas are the key to thought, and that they exist separately from their expression. I would often read student work, and respond by saying that I could see the seeds of very interesting ideas in their writing. And then I would teach them about structure in order to help them better express, communicate those ideas. Now I am much more convinced by the view that language does not name an idea, but that the idea exists within language, within its expression, that our sense of self-consciousness is constructed, if not entirely, then in large part, by language.

I find that Bella's visits to these Literature classes, our discussions afterwards, our examination of the transcripts and discussion about what else *could* have happened if some issues had been taken up instead of others, lead me to think about what it is that I'm doing in ways that are thoroughly invigorating. I return to a perennial question: for what purpose are we educating our students? There are so many good answers to this question, most of them convincing. They are generally framed as statements about personal and social development: maximising potential, gaining a sense of excitement in learning, understanding the cultural heritage, developing the skills to deal with a complex adult life and changing workforce, participating in de-

cision-making, developing an ethos of contributing to society. The emphasis changes subtly from time to time and place to place – multiculturalism is out, sustainability in, economic imperatives almost always there! These are statements with which we could rarely disagree and individualised versions exist now in every school charter, often negotiated across an entire school community.

In my view, however, there is one response which takes precedence over all others. I think my greatest responsibility as a teacher is to help students develop a consciousness of the values, the responsibilities, the behaviours underpinning a democratic process. I want them to understand the fragility of democracy, the way in which it must be consciously held and shaped if it is to avoid being co-opted, becoming illusory. It is in this way that the next generation will be able to re-imagine the future. Without this overarching vision, the value of the other statements of purpose may well be lost.

### 3.2 *Bella Illesca (the Critical Friend)*

When I observed Prue's lessons, I was reminded of Ian Reid's description of the 'Workshop' approach to the teaching of Literature, as distinct from teaching the literary canon (or what Reid calls the 'Gallery' approach). Here is how Reid describes it:

Imagine, if you will... a room for making. As soon as you enter this one you can see and hear that it's quite different from the Gallery. It's messy and noisy, because lots of people are busily at work. There's argument, joking, gossip; there's activity on all sides. One talkative group seems to be either dismantling something or piecing it together; another is intently mixing ingredients, several individuals here and there are bent absordedly over benches, machines, easels, desks... a multi-media experiment seems to be underway in one corner. A few are silently preoccupied with their reading – or is it their writing? And if there are curators here, it's hard to distinguish them from the rest. (Reid, 1984)

Prue's English lessons are very much reminiscent of this kind of 'integrative and interactive' (Reid, 1984, 13) approach. Reid describes it as 'the world of play with the world of work; of literary utterances with ordinary uses of language; of verbal communication with other media of cultural expression; of reading with writing; and of cultural products with their means of production.' (Reid 1984, p. 3).

My memory of Prue's English lessons was that there was a lot of 'exploratory talk' (Barnes, 1976) taking place. I heard Prue's voice, but she didn't dominate conversations. Instead, she let students pursue their own line of inquiry or she guided and probed by asking them questions that encouraged them to pause and reflect or to identify, explain, elaborate their ideas and find ways of connecting with others. There is no formula that Prue relies on to shape the conversations in her lessons. Instead, what is clear is that exploratory talk is at the heart of her lessons and the value that she places on interpersonal exchanges and the exploration of language and meaning is reflected in the lively conversations that I heard taking place between students. Take, for example, this class discussion based on 'A Woman with Black Hair'. The three students who have chosen this story lead the discussion:

- Student 1: It's part of the rapist's ritual
- Prue: In this story it's clear he's been watching her...
- Student 2: Shows he knows ...oddities about her...back door is described as solid, open. Could be a metaphor for herself? Vulnerable? Seems like an independent woman, but man comes in and she breaks down...
- Student 3: Need versus want...
- Student 1: like a sickness...
- Student 2: Doesn't say 'our'...
- Prue: I'd never thought of that...how do you think it works?
- Student 2: She's not defined...defined by the stalker. Who she is doesn't matter...
- Student 1: A biased view of her...tone unsympathetic...
- Prue: Can you find it in this passage...where the tone...?
- Student 2: She becomes a detail in the house as inanimate and lifeless as the doors and the lightshades. Nameless. This is just why he only does it once.
- Student 4: He doesn't need to connect with her...

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

There is no doubt that Prue is providing her students with powerful strategies for using language to interpret the world and to reflect on their interpretations of everything they see around them. Through language, Prue creates spaces within her classes so that her students are made to feel that the words they have to offer are valuable contributions. She is constantly reminding herself and her students of the importance of being able to move 'from the particular to the general' – to see the short story, not as a literary artefact whose author has the final word, but as a diversity of voices that present distinct and multiple value-laden views on the world.

If we willingly see these exchanges not as simply words, but as utterances that are 'ideologically saturated' and part of the '...contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language' (Bakhtin, 1981: 272), then we can begin to understand the contradictory functions that language is performing whenever we speak. Bakhtin (1981) reminds us that the words we speak do not belong to a single speaker, but in fact contain the language and attitudes of other people and places.

With this understanding of language in mind, it is possible to view the above conversation as conveying a sense of the way in which schooling is about acculturation and the reproduction of certain linguistic practices. Students use terms such as 'metaphor', 'tone' and are able to recognise cues as to when to speak and what to say in response to comments and observations about the text. They can identify themes and express their opinions with reference to the language used in the text. They focus on particular words and signs to explore the inner and outer lives of the characters as well as the possible intentions of the author.

The students' conscious and unconscious appropriation of literary discourse to talk about the text reminds me that words do not exist in a vacuum, that they 'lie on

the borderline between oneself and the other' (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293). This can be illustrated by another excerpt from the conversation which I have quoted above about Beverly Farmer's story, 'A Woman with Black Hair'.

- Student 1: ...a biased view of her...tone unsympathetic...
- Prue: Can you find it in this passage...where the tone...
- Student 2: She becomes a detail in the house as inanimate and lifeless as the doors and the lightshades. Nameless. This is just why he only does it once.
- Student 4: He doesn't need to connect with her.
- Student 2: He stands, 'cocky', not hiding – unseen. Brazenness of his behaviour. Impression of how in horror movies...not afraid...
- Student 1: has the right...
- Student 4: weird she uses brackets like that. What's the purpose?
- Student 1: unnecessary information...
- Student 2: Like a side note...in the first person. Makes it more intimate. Don't you think?
- Student 3: Do words in brackets give a different...into his psyche?
- Student 4: Maybe it's the narrator?
- Student 5: I think it's like a monologue. I think it's like a play. Like stage directions...set the mood.

Bella Illesca, Classroom Observation Notes 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Is it possible to view the life of the classroom like the life of the novel? Bakhtin describes the novel thus:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [raznorečie] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorečie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel.

Bakhtin, M. (1981), p.263.

Giving students access to understandings of language that see words and meaning as dynamic and constantly changing is powerful because it shapes their thinking about the world around them in the present and into the future. Here is what Prue had to say in reflections which she sent to me:

One way in which I feel that my students have benefited from my interest in literary theory is that they begin to feel validated and empowered because of the way their view

of the world is both developed and acknowledged. This does not happen quickly, but over time. Many of my year 12 Literature students have not done literature before, and in the beginning they are swamped by a feeling that this is a hard subject, it is a bit mysterious, they're not sure what they're meant to be doing – when they do a passage analysis from one of the texts they're studying, for example. They feel they're on unstable territory, as if I have some secret which I'm not quite revealing about what I want when I ask for *a theory* about what the author of the text might be 'doing' (consciously and unconsciously) in this moment in the text

Prue Gill, Reflections after Classroom Observation, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2004

Prue and her students are complex and contradictory individuals and it would be ill conceived to believe that these conversations could provide us with a 'fixed' and 'finalizable' image of their personal and public identities (Bakhtin 1984). Our words are always showing how we are 'split' in productive dialogue between ourselves and others, between the 'individual' and the 'social'. When I speak it is not as though I am expressing my unique individuality. Quite the contrary, my words show how I am situated in multiple spaces. The words that the students speak are both theirs and not theirs – showing how they are always involved in some kind of productive struggle for meaning. Their spoken words represent the multiple past and present social worlds that they inhabit, as well as gesturing towards potential futures.

#### 4. TWO MORE PERSPECTIVES

The other space in which this conversation about the teaching of literature has been occurring is an international one, involving dialogue between Dutch educators and Australian educators. This section presents the perspectives of the two academics involved in this research project. Piet-Hein Van de Ven reviews the project from the point of view of a researcher based in Holland. Brenton Doecke offers an Australian perspective.

##### 4.1 *Piet-Hein*

The IMEN international comparative research (see Herrlitz & Van de Ven, 2007) aims at 'making the familiar strange', by inviting teachers to allow observers to enter their classrooms as critical friends, and to analyse what they see from their perspectives and conceptual frameworks – in just the same way that Bella entered Prue's classroom. In IMEN research the voice of the teacher is very important, as well as the teachers' analyses and understandings of education. So when I received the original classroom observation data from Prue and Bella, the first thing I decided to do was to discuss the material with Hanneke, a Dutch Language and Literature Teacher<sup>1</sup>.

Hanneke read excerpts of classroom conversation, excerpts of the online conversation between Prue and her students (these have not been presented in this paper,

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Hanneke Houkes, teacher in secondary education with about 10 years of experience.

but form the basis of a chapter by Prue in a recent Australian publication – see Gill, 2005), and excerpts from Bella's interviews with Prue. We paid attention to Prue's teaching methodology, most notably her emphasis on 'trying to get students to approach the stories via the passages – to increase their confidence in moving from the particular to the general' (Prue Gill, Reflections after Classroom Observation, Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2004). By doing this, Prue is continuously asking students about the elements of the text on which they are basing their questions and interpretations. Prue is stimulating interaction, discussion, a variety of opinions, with the result that her students 'begin to feel validated and empowered because of the way their view of the world is both developed and acknowledged' (Prue Gill, Reflections, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2004). McCormick (1994) distinguishes the literary and the general repertoire of texts. In Prue's classroom, the literary repertoire of the text stimulates students to reflect on their general, or rather social (Malmgren & Van de Ven, 1994) repertoire, and the way that language creates a perspective on world, life and humankind. Hanneke thinks this an interesting methodology. She would like to try this out in her own lessons.

Hanneke and I concluded that Prue's main perspective on literature education is creating meaning and 'giving students access to understandings of language that see words and meaning as dynamic and constantly changing' (Prue Gill, this article, section 2). Prue asks students to read a story with questions in their heads: What does the story mean for me? What use can I make of it? Literature education in Prue's classroom seems to be connected to life and world. There are not only 'blurred boundaries' between the classroom and the world outside, but also between 'fiction' and experienced reality.

Hanneke and I also discussed the way Prue inducted her students into the academic discourse on literature. Prue is explaining her theory 'that we are each inevitably, inextricably going to be bringing values and assumptions of our own to a reading of the text and so ... we're always going to have a conversation about a text' (Prue Gill, Excerpt from taped conversation with Bella Illesca, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2004). She is also giving the students concepts to reflect on their own way of discussing with each other and their individual learning styles. In an e-mail which she posted in an online conversation after the class, she asks her students:

Could you think back over the discussion we had in class today, and see if you can jot a note about a moment when you saw one of the dispositions of intellectual character (curiosity, open mindedness, metacognition, truth/understanding seeking, strategic thinking, skepticism<sup>2</sup>) at play. (You might need to refer back to the reading I gave you).

The students respond to this prompt with comments like the following:

'... there was quite a bit of open minded discussion as everyone put forward their view points and took note of other people's thoughts.'

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<sup>2</sup> Ritchhart, R (2002) *Intellectual Character: What it is, Why it Matters and How to Get It* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. In addition to the classroom conversations presented in this article, Prue Gill maintained an online dialogue with her students, where she used categories taken from Ritchhart's text to prompt her students to reflect on the nature of their learning. See Gill, 2005, for further details relating to this dimension of her work.

'I thought everyone worked together contributing different ideas and accepting other points of view with an open mind.'

'Mostly, I saw the "disposition to be truth-seeking and understanding"'.

The students then give examples from the conversations they had to back up these comments. Such an approach appears to support students to find their own voice, even within the world of academic discourse. One of Prue's students reflects on the discussion, which she considered 'successful in that the discussion eventually led to ideas that people had not previously thought of', telling us in her own words about the constructive dimension of dialogue and language. This seems to be a core characteristic of Prue's literature teaching: stimulating reflection, stimulating students to reflect on their reading and their discussion. But in a Dutch classroom we lack, as far as our experiences go, such a meta-perspective on literature and discussion. We do not say this to devalue Dutch literature teaching. We just wonder why this is hardly done in Dutch classrooms (or not done at all). This is the value of comparative research of this kind, that we can look with 'other eyes', not only on literature teaching in other countries, but on the way we teach literature in our own country.

We doubt if a similar approach is possible in the Dutch classroom. First of all Prue works with a small group of cooperative and motivated students for whom the Literature class is a topic of choice. This setting is totally different from Hanneke's: 30 students for whom the Literature class is compulsory. Hanneke wonders how much time the literature class gets in the Australian curriculum. She herself finds she has to hurry through the history of literature, through literary analysis, and so she hardly has time to deal with a story, to interpret a text, to focus on a passage.

#### 4.2 Brenton

We have repeatedly invoked Bakhtin in our accounts of our work together. This may hardly seem surprising, given that the focus of this article has been on dialogue or conversation as an indispensable condition for engaging with literary texts. Yet the word 'dialogue' might be given a common sense meaning that is quite distinct from Bakhtin's understanding of how language mediates experience. Bakhtin's work shows us how we all live *within* language. The words we speak are not simply tools for communicating ideas or experiences that somehow exist outside the language in which they are expressed. When the advocates of 'multiliteracies' celebrate the way young people engage in multimodal forms of communication, they appear to imagine that they are saying something radically new that takes us beyond language (cf. Kalantzis and Cope, 2000, Kress 2000). But you do not choose a language amongst other modes of communication. You inhabit a language, caught up within the play of language and experience, thoughts and words, feelings and the nuances of vocabulary, phrasing, dialect, slang. This is why English makes language its central focus (although this does not stop English teachers from encouraging their students to explore the way language might be combined with visual representation and other semiotic modes in the production of multimedia texts). It is also why English teachers like Prue value literary texts.

Prue remarks that ‘language does not name an idea, but ... the idea exists within language, within its expression’ (See Prue’s reflections, Section 3). The conversations between her students show them constructing a sense of self through words, articulating their own values in dialogue with Beverly Farmer. However, it is also crucial to note that other work is being done here, in addition to conversations about what it means to be a woman in Australian society. As the students try out new words, they listen to how they sound, reflexively monitoring the language and opinions that they find themselves voicing. Like any accomplished writer, Farmer’s stories have their own vocabulary and grammar, a syntax that conveys a sense of her lived experience. Some of the students have begun to develop a feel or taste for the language she uses. But the ventriloquial quality of their conversations derives not only from the way they borrow Farmer’s language, but from their use of the language of literary critical analysis. Prue is giving the students a vocabulary and syntax with which to engage with the language they find in Farmer’s texts. The excerpts from Prue’s conversations with Bella and her lesson plans do not perhaps show this dimension of her work fully, beyond her emphasis on using the words in the text as a basis for reaching a provisional interpretation of what the text means. Prue indicates that at the start of the year, her students find the idea of literature and literary analysis ‘a bit mysterious, they’re not sure what they’re meant to be doing’ (Prue Gill, Reflections, Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2004) . By developing a capacity to engage in a close reading of a literary work, and working from the particular to the general, the students are beginning to use the language of literary critical analysis. Thus they are able to use Farmer’s texts as a vehicle for clarifying a sense of identity and experience.

Prue and Bella’s conversation is itself far more than an explication of ideas that exist outside the flow of their language. Why teach literature? What values and beliefs inform your professional practice as a teacher of literature? It is possible to imagine any number of ways in which teachers might answer these questions. Professional standards are replete with worthy statements about the importance of inducting students into the imaginative worlds of literary texts. What we have in Prue and Bella’s conversation is far more than statements of this kind, but provisional judgements, tentative generalisations that remain subject to review in the light of further experience. It is as though English teachers always use language in the subjunctive mood. Their conversations reflect a sustained inquiry, involving a subtle play between the concrete details of Prue’s classroom and their more general reflections on the complexities of language and literature teaching.

#### 4.3 *Piet-Hein*

Prue wants to empower (my choice of words) her students for adult life by presenting them some language to use, to enrich their discussion on literature and life. Prue and Bella themselves are also enriching their ongoing, reflective dialogue by using – implicitly and explicitly – some important concepts. For me the role of theory, a meta-level in these dialogues, is a kind of ‘red thread’ in the former sections.

In a lot of (Dutch) literature on reflection and reflective practitioners, I perceive a rather superficial perspective on reflection, because attention is hardly ever paid to the role of theory in reflection. A teacher (e.g.) should reflect on her teaching, and such reflection should enable her to discover the essential aspects of her teaching. Questions are hardly ever raised like: ‘What should be the essential aspects? For whom are these aspects essential? From which perspectives do these things appear to be essential?’ Reflection for me means looking at your professional practice from other perspectives than your own. Reflection means looking at your education with the eyes of a student, a colleague, and before all else with the eyes of relevant theory. The teaching profession is a complex profession which requires a comprehensive knowledge base for purposes of reflection and further learning. To say this differently: He who knows nothing, sees nothing and cannot reflect. Prue and Bella haven’t told me that they share this opinion on the role of theory in reflection, but they show me this in their reflections, and it is interesting to see how theoretical concepts shape their exchanges with one another.

An interesting concept is Prue’s ‘blurring boundaries’ in describing the start of the lesson, when her students enter the classroom still talking about things of daily life, but at the same time asking Prue questions about their work. I perceive the same ‘blurring boundaries’ in the tensions which Prue appears to experience between authority and freedom, and before all else between literature and life, when she affirms ‘using literature to raise important questions about self, other, politics, values, context’ (Prue Gill, Reflection after Classroom Observation, Sunday, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2004). In order to achieve this aim, she presents the students with perspectives which they can use in their ‘exploratory talk’ (theories of reading, of academic discourse, of feminism), blurring the boundaries between school and academic life, between teacher knowledge and students’ knowledge, between expert and novice (Bruner, 2004). By engaging in this ‘exploratory talk’, the students themselves blur the boundaries between personal interests, their friendships with one another, and literature. They are, as it were, testing Prue’s theory in the laboratory of their own experiences as young women and secondary school students who are completing their Matriculation. Prue characterises these classroom dialogues by telling me:

... that students were listening to each other, they’re reflecting, questioning, validating, trying ideas out without the need to pin things down as true or false, right or wrong.

Nystrand et. al (1997) develop two different concepts of classroom interaction: recitation versus discussion. Whereas the interaction that is characteristic of recitation mainly serves to transmit knowledge ‘(in)to the students as “tabula rasa”’, discussion creates opportunities for ‘transformation of understandings’. This is the kind of open dialogue Prue is using. Bella observes that ‘exploratory talk is at the heart of Prue’s lessons, that Prue values the exploration of language and meaning’. In Nystrand’s framework transformation of understandings is strongly connected to a certain perspective on knowledge, teaching and learning. Transforming understandings demands an open, interpretive ‘definition’ of knowledge. It sees students and their life experiences as important sources for creating new understandings - it is not only ‘book knowledge’ that counts. Interaction, between teacher and students, and amongst the students themselves, is seen as an important means for learning – Bella

characterises this interaction as ‘integrative and interactive’, referring to Reid (1984).

Prue’s perspective on language and language use fits nicely into this perspective on learning and on the interactive role of the student:

Now I am much more convinced by the view that language does not name an idea, but that the idea exists within language, within its expression, that our sense of self-consciousness is constructed, if not entirely, then in large part, by language. (See Prue’s reflections, Section 3)

Bella observes that Prue does not dominate the conversations. I think for Prue a dialogue on literature is a dialogue in which the student’s text might be constructed, not a monologue to transmit the teacher’s text (cf. Malmgren & Van de Ven, 1994). Such a dialogue raises ‘important questions about self, other, politics, values, context’. It is her responsibility as a teacher to use literature:

... to help students develop a consciousness of the values, the responsibilities, the behaviours underpinning a democratic process (see section 3).

And this kind of dialogue also presupposes a healthy relationship between Prue and her students, as can be seen in the interviews with Bella.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Dialogue is at the centre of the case study presented in this article: between the students and their teacher, between the students themselves as they interact in group discussions. There is dialogue between readers and texts, between Prue and Bella, and between Brenton and Piet-Hein as they in turn join the conversation. Literary texts can themselves be understood as involving a continuing dialogue with other texts, a dialogue which readers enter by making their own connections (as the students did with ‘Pumpkin’ and ‘A Woman with Black Hair’). And all these dialogues together contribute to a transformation of understandings, or rather, they create new understandings, reminding us of how language mediates experience. But we can draw further conclusions about the quality of *the classroom dialogue* and the *reflective dialogue* by the four authors.

In IMEN research we compare the *classroom interaction* with the structure of an iceberg: Above the waterline the top of the dialogue is visible. However, below the surface of the water different layers of meaning making are hidden (Cf. Herrlitz, 2007). These layers consist of:

- Concepts which determine the construction of the learning *content*; in this case the literary and social repertoire of texts and readers; but also the concepts of the academic discourse with which students try to acquaint themselves.
- Concepts which determine the construction of the teaching learning *process*; in this case Prue’s perspective on the role of classroom dialogue, as well as her procedure from passage to story to the whole bundle of stories; we could also think of the role of metacognition as students engage in reflection on the quality of their discussion.

- More *general principles* of language education which underlie the aforementioned concepts, in this case study clearly formulated by Prue (in section 3): ‘to help students develop a consciousness of the values, the responsibilities, the behaviours underpinning a democratic process. I want them to understand the fragility of democracy, the way in which it must be consciously held and shaped if it is to avoid being co-opted, becoming illusory. It is in this way that the next generation will be able to re-imagine the future’. But in addition to this explicit statement of her professional commitment as an English teacher, there is a principle of language education which shows students that language is not just a handy tool for communication, but a means of making meaning, of interpretation, of constructing knowledge and perspectives on self, world and other.

We can see from the ways in which these layers of meaning and interaction can be reconstructed that the classroom dialogue in Prue’s class is extraordinarily rich.

We all live *within* language. In this case study we perceive a very rich set of dialogues in which different kinds of language are involved: the exploratory talk by students, their daily life talk, the exploratory and theorizing talk of teachers and researchers. The case study shows us that learning really is ‘entering a discourse’ (Bruffee, 1984), not only by beginning to use the language of the discourse, but also by mediating the deeper layers of the discourse. This, finally, must be seen as a Vygotskian dialogue that has taken all those involved beyond their existing knowledge and experience, a multiple scaffolding in which they have all – students, teachers, academics – explored possibilities that would not have otherwise been available to them.

*The reflective dialogue* is a dialogue which – as we experience(d) it – matches Habermas’s (1981) criterion of ‘Herrschaftsfreie Dialog’ that is: a real dialogue, in which there is no hierarchic dimension, open or hidden. Research cannot dictate what *should* happen in teaching; the differences between conceptual frameworks in which teachers and researchers operate are accepted and can potentially enrich the dialogue between them. The joint conceptual framework constructed in this contribution appears to be a rich one, too.

Zeichner & Tabachnick (1991, p.3), referring to Zeichner & Liston (1990), distinguish four ‘versions’ of ‘reflective teaching’, each with its own object for reflection:

- ‘an academic version that stresses reflection upon subject matter and the representation and translation of subject matter knowledge to promote student understanding (...)’;
- ‘a social efficiency version that emphasizes the thoughtful application of particular teaching strategies that have been suggested by research on teaching (...)’;
- ‘a developmentalist version that prioritizes teaching that is sensitive to students’ interests, thinking and patterns of developmental growth (...)’;
- ‘a social constructionist version that stresses reflection about the social and political context of schooling and the assessment of classroom actions for their ability to contribute toward greater equity, social justice and humane conditions in schooling and society (...)’.

Zeichner & Tabachnick state that: ‘None of these traditions is sufficient in itself for providing a moral basis for teaching and teacher education. Good teaching and teacher education need to attend to all of the elements that are brought into focus by the various traditions’ (p. 3). If we broaden the concept of teacher education to teachers’ learning, we can argue that the case study constructed in this article, as well as the article itself meet the requirement by Zeichner & Tabachnick to bring all these dimensions together. We perceive how present education is endangered in the sense that it is being stripped of such a moral basis, because nowadays teaching is to a large extent driven by imperatives that are imposed on teachers and teaching, in which an instrumental perspective on language and education constructs a utilitarian paradigm in language teaching, and disempowers teachers and their students (Sawyer & Van de Ven, 2007).

Teaching literature and reflecting on it in the way that has been enacted in this article provides a powerful counterpoint to such a utilitarian view.

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